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ENGLISH FURNITURE IN THE PALMER COLLECTION

MADE between 1680 and 1689, and evidently for royal use, two richly carved walnut arm chairs are the oldest of the twenty-three pieces of English furniture in the George S. Palmer Collection. The earlier of the two chairs (fig. 1)¹ may be dated in the later years of the reign of Charles II. This date, about 1680-85, is indicated by the scrolled legs with cherub heads, as well as by the design of the stretcher with its Tudor rose between Flemish curves. The spiral twist, which is a notable feature of this chair, came into popularity shortly after 1663, when Charles married the Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza. The fashion for twisted rails and balusters in English furniture is probably due to Indo-Portuguese influence. The fashion is said to have arisen in Portugal from the imitation of Indian furniture, in which the spiral twist appears. It will be recalled that at this time Portugal had several trading stations on the northwest coast of India. The cresting of this important Charles II chair is particularly interesting. A royal crown surmounts an escutcheon, originally painted, which is flanked by the lion and unicorn, the royal supporters of England. The crown is frequently used as a decorative device, expressive of loyalty to the throne, in the furniture of the Restoration period, but the use of the royal supporters would indicate that the Palmer chair was made for royalty itself. Portugal has already been mentioned in connection with the twisted rails; the cherub heads derive more or less directly from Italy, and the carving of the acanthus is distinctly Flemish. This susceptibility to foreign influences is thoroughly characteristic of English furniture design, as we shall have occasion several times to note.

French influence was paramount during the brief reign of James II. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, as well as earlier oppressive measures, led to a great exodus from France of trained craftsmen, particularly weavers, who found in

England ready employment and protection. Something of this French influence is seen in the low relief decoration of the second arm chair¹ in the Palmer Collection (fig. 2), although the principal carving would seem to be Italian in character. On stylistic evidence, the chair may be assigned approximately to the years 1685-88. This date is confirmed by the cipher, which, with the royal supporters of England, forms the cresting, and is that of James II (1685-88) and of his consort Mary Beatrice, a princess of the House of Este. The eagle, it will be recalled, is the principal heraldic charge in the Este arms, and probably for this reason has been introduced as a decorative motive in the carving of this chair, which appears to have been made for Queen Mary Beatrice, who was born in 1658, married James, then Duke of York, in 1673, and died in 1718. The back was originally upholstered and the seat caned. The present upholstery is not original, although of contemporary date. The chair is in wonderful preservation, although the painting and gilding, with which it was originally enriched, naturally show the effect of time. Both arm chairs are of walnut, a wood which came into use in England during the Restoration period, at first only for light pieces of furniture, and continued in increasing favor until mahogany became the fashionable wood in the second quarter of the eighteenth century.

When Queen Anne died in 1714, the crown passed to the House of Hanover. George I (1714-1727) was a Hanoverian exile in England, pining for his dear Herrenhausen, and his sympathies were remote from the people over whom he ruled in his transplanted German court. Unlike Queen Anne, William and Mary, and their predecessors, the German prince and his entourage did not patronize the arts, and his accession to the throne of England had little effect other than a negative one upon English furniture design.

A period of digestion ensued from 1714 to about 1745, that is, from the death of Queen Anne to the appearance in the world of fashion of the artist-craftsman,

¹Accession No. 18.110.39.

¹Accession No. 18.110.18.

Thomas Chippendale, who some ten years earlier, about 1735, had commenced his career in London. During this inchoate period, foreign fashions in vogue during the previous reigns were assimilated, and from this heterogeneous inheritance a

classification proposed by Herbert Cescinsky in his monumental work on English furniture of the eighteenth century has many points to commend it, and his divisions have been followed in the dating of the important group of early Georgian



FIG. 1. ROYAL ARM CHAIR, WALNUT
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1680-1685

style was evolved which, although still marked by foreign influences, was nevertheless distinctively British.

The dating of furniture in this early Georgian period prior to Chippendale's rise to popularity presents many obvious difficulties, and various attempts at classification have been made. The scheme of

furniture in the Palmer Collection. It is natural that the dates defining the limits of Mr. Cescinsky's divisions should overlap, as the new styles did not immediately supersede the old. The divisions are as follows: the Decorated Queen Anne (1714-1725); the Lion Period (1720-1735); the Satyr-Mask Period (1730-1740); the Ca-

bochon-and-leaf Period (1735 onward); and the Architects' furniture (about 1720-1750).

The Decorated Queen Anne Period continues the models of 1702-1714, but elaborates the carving of the arms, legs, and backs of chairs and tables. Walnut is still the wood commonly in use, but a new note is added by the gilding of the carving. Characteristic of this richly decorated furniture is a small tripod or tea-kettle stand¹ dating about 1720-1725, of mahogany, an early instance of the use of this wood. It is also interesting as an early example of tripod furniture, which from about 1750 to 1770 held an important place in English fashions.

The Lion Period overlaps the preceding by a few years. It is characterized by the fashion of carving heads of lions on the knees of chairs and table legs and on the arms of chairs and settees. To correspond, the feet are usually carved with lions' paws. The genesis of this decorative motive cannot be determined with certainty, but as the lion head, together with the satyr-mask, is of frequent occurrence in German cabinet work of the late Renaissance, it is not at all improbable, as it has been suggested, that the introduction of this feature in English furniture was out of compliment to the House of Hanover.

Two side chairs² of walnut veneer with boldly carved lions' heads on the knees are fine early examples of this mode (fig. 3). They may be dated about 1720-30. The backs of the chairs, with leaf and husk carving on the splat, illustrate the ornate character of the decorated Queen Anne style. Another fine example of lion furniture, this time of mahogany, the wood most frequently used for this kind of furniture, is an arm chair,³ decorated with lions' heads and the scallop shell of earlier fashion. This piece dates from about 1725-30.

In the Decorated Queen Anne Period the eagle's head was a favorite finish for the arms and legs of chairs and settees, and was introduced as a decorative motive in

the designs of the backs. That this device continued in favor into the second quarter of the eighteenth century is shown by a mahogany card table¹ of ingenious construction, which must be assigned approximately to the years 1735-40 on other evidence. The top is covered with green baize, and has pockets sunk for counters. Card playing was the fashionable vice of the eighteenth century, particularly during the late Georgian era, and card tables were indispensable pieces of furniture.

In the Soane Museum, London, there is an arm chair of most elaborate design which by some has been claimed as the work of Chippendale. There is said to have been in the possession of the museum a receipt for the payment of this chair signed by Chippendale. This document, however, cannot be produced, and is consequently a very doubtful piece of evidence. Judging from the style of the chair, it would date about 1730-40, so that if it were by Chippendale it would be the work of the elder, the father of the great cabinet-maker. Six side chairs and a settee of the same design are in the Pendleton Collection, Providence, Rhode Island. In the Palmer Collection are an arm chair (fig. 5) and a side chair of this pattern.² We know, then, two arm chairs, seven side chairs, and a double chair or settee, which probably represent the entire set, although the odd number of side chairs is unusual. These chairs are of exceptional importance not only for their unusual design but also for the beauty of the carving. In the design such familiar motives as the eagle's head, the shell, the satyr-mask, and the cupid's head may be noted. The basic form or outline is Dutch in style, but very much modified by other influences. In this connection we may note that the French fashion, which played so important a part in the development of Chippendale, is not indicated in these chairs.

A superb example of furniture design of about the years 1735-40 is a mahogany arm chair³ with an inverted fan back, a

¹Accession No. 18.110.16.

²Accession Nos. 18.110.41-42.

³Accession No. 18.110.22.

¹Accession No. 18.110.9.

²Accession Nos. 18.110.20-21.

³Accession No. 18.110.55.

modification of the hoop-back type of the Queen Anne period (fig. 4). The low relief carving is in harmony with the graceful character of this chair, distinguished for its beauty of line and proportions. It is said

of this pattern are known; for example, those in the Pendleton Collection and others in the possession of Sir Henry Hoare and elsewhere. Undoubtedly these chairs were not all of one set. As Mr. Cescinsky



FIG. 2. ROYAL ARM CHAIR, WALNUT
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1685-1688

that a large set of this pattern was made in the workshops of Chippendale for Marie Antoinette, and according to Cescinsky there was such a set made by Chippendale and since dispersed, although there is no foundation for the Marie Antoinette tradition. A considerable number of chairs

writes: "The probability is that the house of Chippendale was merely commissioned by the French Monarch to duplicate a well-known and fashionable pattern." The ascription of our chair to the years 1735-40 is based on design characteristics, although it is quite possible, as we know from

other instances, that a fashionable pattern might be repeated many years afterwards. A pair of mahogany stools¹ may be assigned to the same years, 1735-1740. The cabriole legs carved with leaf motives are particularly fine.

Dating a little later than the chairs which we have just described and approxi-



FIG. 3. WALNUT SIDE CHAIR
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1720-1730

mately contemporary with the early work of Chippendale after his establishment in London, is a richly carved arm chair,² hoop-backed, with elaborately pierced splat, the cabriole legs terminating in dolphin heads and the knees decorated with flowers in low relief (fig. 7). This chair may be dated between 1740 and 50. Even at this late date the influence of Queen Anne models is felt in the general

shape of the chair, but the ornamental motives, particularly in the splat, betray the growing influence of the contemporary fashions at the court of Louis XV. Chippendale may have made such a chair—certainly the beauty of the design and the vigor of the execution are not unworthy of his hand; but it is impossible to speak with any certainty since it was not until 1754 that Chippendale brought out his *Gentleman's & Cabinet Maker's Director*, which conveys to us all that we really know of the Chippendale style. It is interesting to add that the Museum already possesses of the same pattern as this chair a settee which formed part of the Cadwalader Bequest.

An unusual piece of furniture is a mahogany knife and fork wagon,¹ a low table with four legs, mounted upon casters, and supporting a tray with a central partition. The style of the carving, as well as the rather heavy character of the piece, permits it to be classed among the so-called Irish Chippendale furniture. This designation is a misnomer, since the evidence for the English origin of these tables appears most convincing, although a provincial origin, nevertheless, is indicated by the general style of workmanship and design. The date of our piece is approximately 1740-50.

The style which bears the name of Chippendale, we are apt to forget sometimes, did not originate with him. No historic style is ever the work of any one man. Thomas Chippendale was not the only man in the metropolis to work in the style to which we give his name today, and this very style was but the outgrowth of the years of assimilation which had preceded it. Chippendale was, however, in all probability the most gifted of the cabinet-makers of his time, not only in designing, but in the practical execution of his patterns. The name of Chippendale does not occur in the inventories of furniture of his time, and it is only in recent years that we have used the name of this cabinet-maker, made familiar to us by his publication of designs for furniture, as a general designation for work produced at this period by

¹Accession No. 18.110.5.

¹Accession Nos. 18.110.23-24.

²Accession No. 18.110.46.

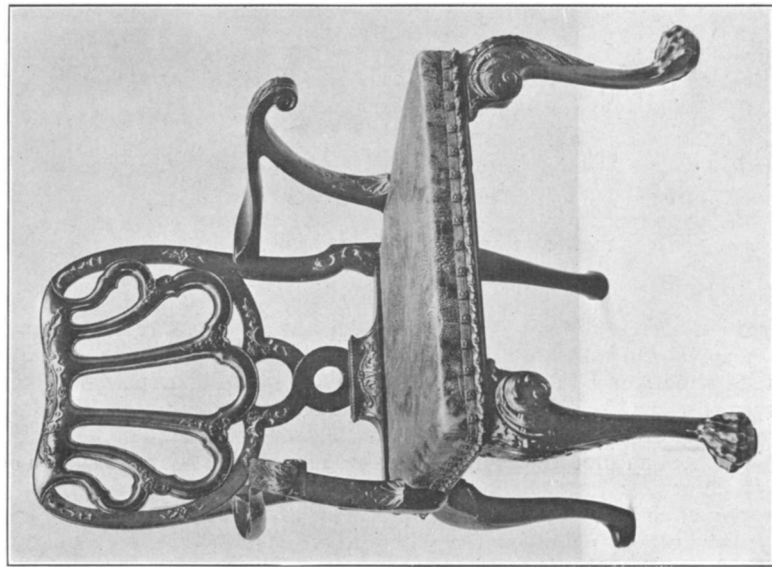


FIG. 4. MAHOGANY ARM CHAIR
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1735-1740

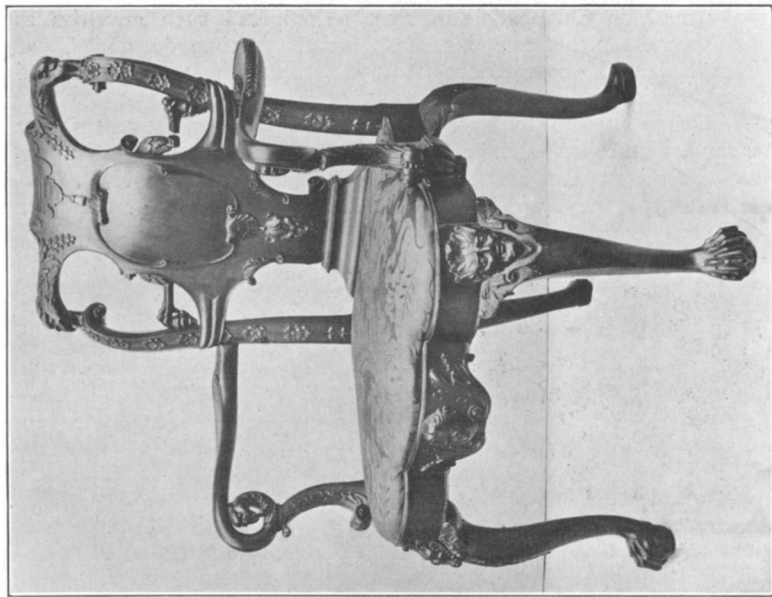


FIG. 5. MAHOGANY ARM CHAIR
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1730-1740

the English cabinet-makers. When we describe furniture as "Chippendale," it does not necessarily mean that the furniture was actually made in Chippendale's St. Martin's Lane workshop, but may include other pieces made by his competitors under this general heading.

Chippendale's father appears to have been a joiner and picture-frame maker from Worcester who migrated to London some time between 1720 and 1727. The

development from the furniture fashions of the early Georgian period. Upon this foundation of good workmanship and design, he imposed such novelties as the fashions of his time demanded, catering to tastes so divergent as Gothic, Chinese, and French.

About the middle of the century, strange as it may seem, there was a distinct tendency toward a Gothic revival, but such men as Batty Langley, for example, who



FIG. 6. MAHOGANY TRIPOD TABLE
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1760-1765

son commenced business in Conduit Street close to Longacre about the year 1735. It was not until some ten or fifteen years later, 1745-1750, that he appears to have acquired renown and commenced to exert any marked influence on furniture production. In 1753 he removed to the more fashionable region of 60 St. Martin's Lane and in the following year published the first edition of his famous *Director*, which had required several years in preparation. In his earliest work, which is undoubtedly his finest, Chippendale shows his gradual

were its proponents, were sadly ignorant of the true nature of Gothic. Such borrowed details as the trefoil, the pointed arch, the chamfered molding, and the triple column were combined with other details so foreign in style as to show a complete failure to understand the underlying principles of Gothic art. The Chinese *Designs* of Edwards and Darly appeared in the same year as the *Director* and offered the wealthy public a new opportunity for adventures in taste. As one may imagine, Chippendale catered to his fash-

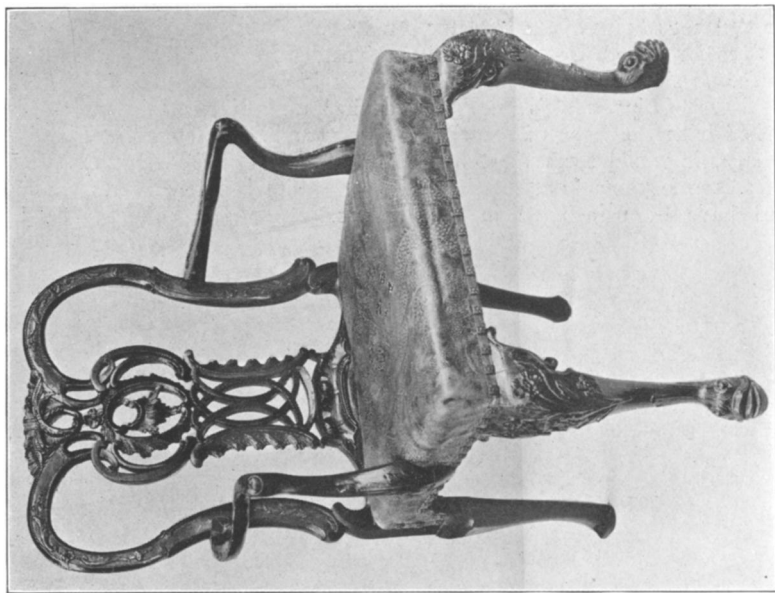


FIG. 7. MAHOGANY ARM CHAIR
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1740-1750

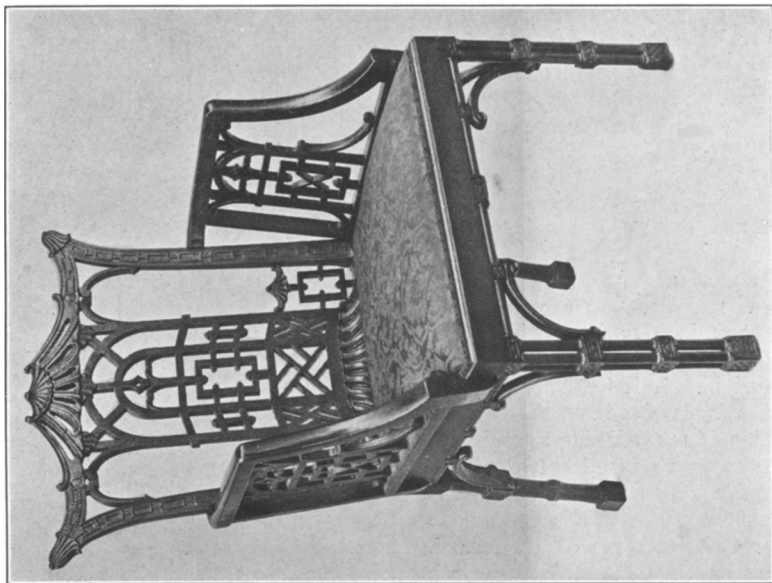


FIG. 8. MAHOGANY ARM CHAIR
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1755-1760

ionable clientele by including in his Director designs in both the Gothic and the Chinese taste, and although many of his designs in this direction are too extravagant to have been carried out, there is no doubt that he produced a quantity of furniture, often of great charm, in the Gothic and the Chinese manner.

A mahogany arm chair in the "Chinese taste,"¹ with its elaborate frets and clustered legs is an admirable example of furniture in this exotic manner (fig. 8). It may be dated about 1755-60. A few years later, about 1760-65, is an arm chair² combining certain Gothic motives, the pointed arch, for example, with others French in origin. It is hybrid in design, but nevertheless pleasing in result.

The fashion of tea drinking as an afternoon function, which raged between 1760 and 1770, gave a decided impulse to the production of tilt-top or tripod tables, made popular by Chippendale and his school. As we have seen, the tripod table used as a tea-kettle or candle-stand occurs in the early Georgian period, and presumably furnished the suggestion from which the tripod tea-table was evolved. Although Chippendale included in the first edition of the Director various designs for tripod fire-screens and candle-stands, no single tripod table is illustrated. Since Chippendale's designs were compiled with the hope of securing new patronage, it would seem that, had tripod tables been fashionable at the time, they would have been included in the Director. It is a reasonable inference that the fashion for tripod tables, which were

made in considerable numbers during the later half of the eighteenth century, commenced shortly after 1754.

A remarkably beautiful example¹ of the tilt or snap-top table is included among the Palmer pieces (fig. 6). The legs and pillar are most elaborately carved and the pie-crust top is finely designed. The date is about 1760-65. Another fine piece is a three-tier waiter² with tripod feet. This piece dates about 1760-70, and although the carving is not of the superlatively fine quality of the tea table, it is an exceptional example of an unusual type.

If the furniture of the first half of the eighteenth century is anonymous in character, in the second half of the century designing was in the hands of artist-craftsmen of marked individuality.

Although the brothers Adam were not cabinet-makers, they designed furniture which was executed by others, Chippendale among them, and the classical style which they made fashionable necessarily had a vast influence upon furniture. A mahogany round-about chair³ in the Palmer Collection is an excellent example of the Adam influence in furniture design, and may be dated about 1770.

The delicate and refined style of Hepplewhite is well exemplified in four arm chairs⁴ of satinwood ornamented with carving and inlaid decoration, dating about 1780-85. The shield back favored by Hepplewhite is finely illustrated in these chairs.

J. B.

¹Accession No. 18.110.43.

²Accession No. 18.110.19.

¹Accession No. 18.110.14.

²Accession No. 18.110.15.

³Accession No. 18.110.49.

⁴Accession Nos. 18.110.50-53.